



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



# SD GUARD FAMILY READINESS GROUP RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD

For the fourth time in five years, the Department of Defense awarded a South Dakota Army National Guard unit with the Reserve Family Readiness Award for the Army National Guard.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs presented the Rapid City and Wagner-based 155th Engineer Company with the award for 2016 at the Pentagon, March 24.

The annual award is presented to one unit from each of the seven Reserve components that demonstrate excellence in engaging with and supporting their members' families. Units represented come from the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and the Coast Guard Reserve.

The award recognizes the top unit Family Readiness Groups with the best programs that support new and impactful ways to connect with families - especially while a unit is preparing to deploy, on deployment and after they return home.

The 155th deployed to Kuwait from August 2015-July 2016 and completed new construction and remodeling projects at bases across the Middle East.

Past winners include: the 1742nd Transportation Company, Sioux Falls and Flan-dreau, who received the 2014 award; the 235th Military Police Company, Rapid City and Sioux Falls, who received the 2013 award; and the 842nd Engineer Company, Spearfish, Belle Fourche and Sturgis, who received the 2012 award.



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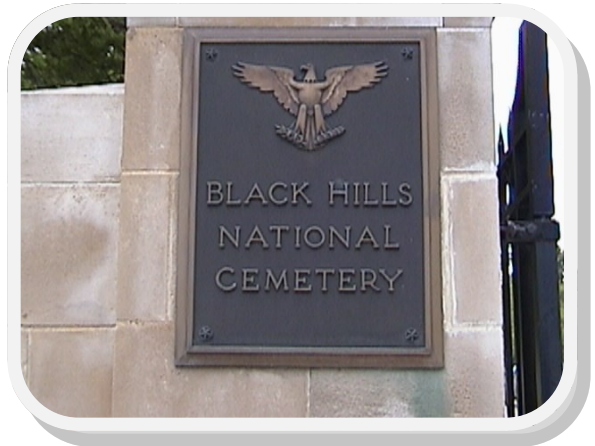
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## VA NOW PROVIDING ONLINE DAILY BURIAL SCHEDULES FOR ITS NATIONAL CEMETERIES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced a new online Daily Burial Schedule (DBS) for all VA national cemeteries, which will allow families and loved ones to retrieve time and location information for those being interred, via its National Cemetery Administration (NCA) website.

"We pride ourselves on continuously improving customer satisfaction and meeting the wishes of Veterans and their loved ones," said interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald E. Walters. "We want manageable information for anyone wishing to pay their respects."

The new feature is available to anyone with a smartphone, tablet or computer. Families may also opt out of using this service. Schedules of interments are posted online and updated hourly at: [www.cem.va.gov/dailyburialschedule](http://www.cem.va.gov/dailyburialschedule). The public can search by national cemetery or last name. DBS will give the scheduled committal service date, time, location of the cemetery, and funeral home providing services. The location of the committal shelter will be provided at the cemetery. In addition, users may also navigate to the specific VA national cemetery website for directions and further information.



The VA operates 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries. The VA also provides funding to establish, expand, improve, and maintain 105 veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan. For veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, the VA provides headstones, markers, or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2016, the VA honored more than 345,000 veterans and their loved ones with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal, and private cemeteries.

## SFVAHCS TO HONOR VIETNAM VETERANS

The Sioux Falls VA Medical Center and Dakotas Regional Office invite area Vietnam Veterans to stop by the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center on March 30, from 7:00 AM – 3:00 PM.

The VA leadership will be stationed in the front foyer of the medical center to thank and honor Vietnam Veterans for their service and sacrifice with a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative pin.

By presidential proclamation on May 25, 2012, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam War commemoration extends from Memorial Day 2012 through Veterans Day 2025. The commemoration recognizes those who served on active duty from November 1, 1955 – May 15, 1975 – regardless of duty station. Each living Vietnam Veteran who served from 1955-1975 is eligible to receive one of the lapel pins.

## VA/DOD STUDY A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH FOR UNDERSTANDING PTSD

Researchers from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) recently released findings of a new study called Prospective Post-Traumatic Stress ? Disorder Symptom Trajectories in Active Duty and Separated Military Personnel, which examines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in veterans, compared with active-duty populations.

This is the first known study comparing PTSD symptom trajectories of current service members with those of veterans, and is the product of a collaborative effort from the VA and DOD researchers analyzing data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), the largest prospective health study of military service members.

According to the VA's National Center for PTSD, the PTSD rate among Vietnam Veterans was 30.9 percent for men and 26.9 percent for women. For Gulf War Veterans, the PTSD rate was 12.1 percent. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans had a PTSD rate of 13.8 percent.

"Knowing there are similarities in how PTSD affects service members and veterans makes it easier to pinpoint which treatments are the best to control the condition," said Dr. Edward Boyko, an epidemiologist and internist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington state, and VA's lead researcher on the Millennium Cohort Study.

Officials involved with the project said they are hoping the collaboration will improve the understanding of veterans' health needs, relative to their experiences in service.

"The data that MCS researchers have been collecting since 2001 is incredibly valuable for both the DOD and the VA," said Dr. Dennis Faix, director of the Millennium Cohort Study and preventive medicine physician. "Going forward, working with the VA will allow both agencies to make sure we are getting the best information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of health in current and former service members."

The results of the joint VA DOD study will appear in the Journal of Psychiatric Research's June 2017 issue. It is the first of many joint future publications expected to result from the collaboration between VA and MCS.

You can learn more about the study at: <http://millenniumcohort.org/>.



The USD Student Veterans Club and the Student Veterans Resource Center are hosting a 5K Fun Run this spring under the title RED Run. **"RED" stands for Remember Everyone Deployed.**

This is a way to honor and keep in our thoughts, those who are deployed overseas. This run, which will tour much of the Vermillion community, is a way to raise money for care packages to send to those overseas, as well as set up an emergency fund for some of our student veterans who may be tight on available funds.

Please help spread the word! Add the event to your calendars, newsletters and bulletins.

If you are in the area, get a team of friends, colleagues or family members together and run or walk.

Here is a link to get registered: <http://www.allsportcentral.com/EventInfo.cfm?EventID=65151>

- When: Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00 am.
- Where: Northwest corner of Prentis Park in Vermillion.
- Register online at all-sportcentral.com, search for RED Run.
- Online registration-\$25 for individual and \$100 for team of five (guaranteed a t-shirt).
- Discounted day of registration, but no t-shirt.
- Donations accepted via allsportcentral.com, or day of with checks written to USD Vets Club.
- Prizes for most **PATRIOTIC** and most **RED** outfit/costume for both individual and team. Any help is appreciated, whether it be volunteers, donations, or participants.

**REMEMBER EVERYONE DEPLOYED**

**RUN**

**APRIL 22ND 10 AM**

**5K FUN RUN PRIZES!**

**CATEGORIES:**

1. RED
2. PATRIOTIC

\*Prizes for best individual and best team.

**FIRST ANNUAL 5K FUN RUN & WALK**

**Details:**

- ★ Register online by April 7th to receive a t-shirt at [allsportcentral.com](http://allsportcentral.com)  
\$25 per individual  
\$100 per team of 5.
- ★ Onsite Registration available  
Day-of registration discounted without t-shirt
- ★ Day-of registration closes at 9:45 AM  
& race will begin at 10:00 AM
- ★ Race starts at Northwest corner of Prentis Park at 10 AM  
A map of the run will be available at the race

**REMEMBER. EVERYONE. DEPLOYED.**

**SCAN TO SIGN UP**

**CONTACT: SVRC** STUDENT VETERAN RESOURCE CENTER  
PHONE: 605-677-3944  
EMAIL: [svrc@usd.edu](mailto:svrc@usd.edu)  
LOCATION: Center for Continuing Education Room 117D

**USD Veteran's Club**



## BLACK HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY TO HONOR VIETNAM VETERANS

The Black Hills National Cemetery will host a Vietnam War 50th Anniversary commemoration ceremony to thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War. The ceremony will be held on Monday, April 3, 2017, at 9:30 am (MT) at the Black Hills National Cemetery Committal Shelter.

The keynote speaker will be Adriene S. Benton, director of the Black Hills National Cemetery.

Vietnam Veteran will be presented a Vietnam Veteran lapel pin, followed by a reflection of this nation's thanks for their service and sacrifice.

## BLACK HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY TO HONOR THE 100-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED STATES ENTERING WORLD WAR I

The Black Hills National Cemetery will conduct a wreath laying ceremony to honor the 100th anniversary of the United States entry into World War I. The ceremony will be held on Thursday, April 6, 2017, at 9:30 am (MT) and will be held at the BHNC Flag Pole and Committal Shelter area.

BHNC Director Adriene Benton will serve at the keynote speaker for the event.

## HOWARD WOOD DAKOTA RELAYS TO HONOR SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS

The 92nd annual Howard Wood Dakota Relays will be held on May 5-6, 2017, at Howard Wood Field. Events will start at 11:00 am on Friday and 9:00 am on Saturday.

Veterans and their immediate family are invited to be guests that weekend. There will be a special VETERANS GATE for veterans to enter.

All veterans will be recognized during the program. Visit the following link for more information:

<http://www.dakotarelays.com>.



## MOBILE VET CENTERS ARE HITTING THE ROAD

When a Vet Center is miles from your home, it's a long drive to access its many services. When those services come to you on wheels, life gets a little more convenient.

Doug McCuddin, Veterans Outreach Specialist with the Sioux Falls Vet Center, will be on hand to provide "Combat-Era" Veterans with information on Vet Center counseling services and referral materials to other VA and Community agencies in Britton, Aberdeen and Webster.

Here is his itinerary:



Town	Date	Times	Location of MVC
Britton	April 4 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 am to 3:00 pm	Park by VSO's Office
Aberdeen	April 5 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	VA CBOC parking lot
Webster	April 6 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	Southside of Courthouse

## ZIMMERMAN THANKS SOCIAL WORKERS

SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman had the distinct honor to speak at the VABHHCS luncheon honoring their social workers on Monday of this week. The theme for the celebration was "Social Workers Stand Up."

"As I talked with many of the VA social workers their faces showed the kindness and caring they all have for our veterans," said Secretary Zimmerman.

"These social workers live by core values and ethics with all actions taken on behalf of our veterans. Addictions, PTSD, and all other issues will be given care and understanding by these dedicated team members," said Zimmerman.

## **VA AND GAO AGREE: APPEALS REFORM NEEDED**

In response to a report released by the Government Accountability Office's (GAO), "VA Disability Benefits: Additional Planning Would Enhance Efforts to Improve the Timeliness of Appeals Decisions," the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the following statement:

The VA appreciates the work of the GAO. This report confirms that the current law and process for adjudicating appeals is not consistent with the commitment we have made to our nation's veterans.

"Veterans are waiting far too long for decisions in our current appeals process," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin. "We have made bold changes to remove the bureaucratic red tape that has caused veterans to wait an average of three years before they get a decision."

"The VA has developed sound and aggressive plans regarding hiring, training and mitigation strategies that are already being aggressively implemented. In addition, the VA recognizes the importance of effective management practices for the development of information systems to help integrate and streamline the appeals process. Our new Casflow system will help us anticipate new information requirements, allowing us to quickly address challenges and provide our employees the support they need."

There is broad consensus that the current VA appeals system is broken and in urgent need of reform. Our proposal for a new appeals process was designed in conjunction with Veterans Service Organizations and other key stakeholders. The VA strongly disagrees with GAO about the need for any type of piloting, which would only unnecessarily delay the implementation of the bold changes veterans expect us to make.

"We have a number of reports and studies, including this one from GAO, which have helped us clearly identify the problems in the current system," said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Tom Murphy.

The VA is working to make as many changes to the system allowed by current law.

"We need our partners in Congress to act swiftly, so we can implement the changes we all agree need to be made," Secretary Shulkin said. "I am personally committed to work with Congress over the coming months to get this done."

## **VABHHCS DAKOTAS VA REGIONAL OFFICE TO HOST VETERAN TOWN HALL AND CLAIMS CLINIC**

The VA Black Hills Health Care System and the Dakotas VA Regional Office will host a Veterans Town Hall at 6:00 p.m. on April 6, 2017, at the Western Dakota Tech, Dakota Lecture Hall, Room D148 in Rapid City. Veterans, family members, survivors, and the public are invited to provide feedback on VA operations and recommendations for the VA programs and services. The meetings are intended to provide an open forum for the VA to hear directly from beneficiaries to continue their system-wide improvements for veteran care.

A Services and Benefits Claims Clinic will be held from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the same location. During this Claims Clinic, VBA representatives will be present to receive claims for compensation benefits. The VA will have secure electronic access to benefit records and can answer questions on compensation claims. Veterans may also bring health care questions regarding the Veterans Choice Program, mental health services, and eligibility and enrollment.



## 129TH SOLDIERS SHARPEN PUBLIC AFFAIRS SKILL IN SOUTH KOREA

Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment honed their public affairs skills while training during the Key Resolve exercise March 12-23 in the Republic of Korea. The exercise provided 12 members of the Rapid City-based unit with realistic training opportunities that support the mission of a public affairs detachment.

The 129th trained alongside Eighth Army public affairs staff during the multinational training exercise that enhances U.S. and ROK forces' operational capabilities to increase alliance readiness, protect the region and maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The command post exercise provides for scenarios that may occur for military forces on the Korean Peninsula. Those participating include ROK allies as well as U.S. components of the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force.

"Key Resolve provided the unit with an opportunity to train overseas on our mission essential and key collective tasks while operating at a multinational, joint-service component level," said Maj. Anthony Deiss, commander of the 129th MPAD.

Deiss said the unit was able to interact and function with their active-duty counterparts at a strategic level and integrate into operational processes involving real-world scenarios.

For the unit to perform effectively, it takes soldiers who are trained and competent. Experiences such as Key Resolve allow soldiers to train and refine their skills in a high-paced operational environment.

Members of the unit also received valuable training by developing professional relationships with active-duty public affairs personnel, as well as Korean Augmentees to the United States Army.

The integration into and support of an active-duty unit allowed the 129th Soldiers to test their abilities at a pace that pushed them above their limits.

Through participation in the exercise, Eighth Army and 129th leadership are confident the unit is prepared to perform their state and federal mission.

"This is a great training opportunity and a chance for us to exercise our operational processes," said Deiss. "With the experienced gained, we will continue to refine our best practices to communicate and shape messaging on the home front or the battlefield."





## LEGISLATION TO PROTECT VETERAN CREDIT SCORES HAS BEEN REINTRODUCED

U.S. Senators Mike Rounds and Joe Donnelly reintroduced bipartisan legislation that would protect the credit ratings of veterans wrongly penalized by medical bill payment delays by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

“When veterans receive care in the community, they shouldn’t have to worry about a delayed payment from the VA negatively impacting their credit score,” said Rounds. “Our legislation would make sure that veterans are protected from medical debt wrongfully charged to them instead of the VA. It also creates a simple dispute process to correct the veteran’s credit history.”

“Veterans should be able to access quality health care without worrying that delayed payments from the VA will hurt their credit scores,” said Donnelly. “This bipartisan legislation would protect veterans from credit damage that can make it harder to get a job, buy a house, or rent an apartment. The men and women who have put their lives on the line for our country deserve nothing less.”

The *Protecting Veterans Credit Act* would prohibit medical debt from services received through the Choice Program and other VA community care programs from being reported to credit reporting agencies for one year. This delay provides adequate time for the VA and its contractors to resolve the issues. The Protecting Veterans’ Credit Act would also allow veterans to dispute and remove adverse actions already on their reports.

In addition to the support of the Consumer Federation of America and the National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients), several veterans advocacy organizations have expressed their support for the legislation including the American Legion, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

**Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander, The American Legion said,** “The American Legion supports the *Protecting Veterans Credit Act* which will help ensure that our veterans’ credit scores are not harmed by VA delays in payment of medical bills incurred under the Choice Program. Presently, some veterans’ credit is being adversely affected when they seek care outside the VA system and receive bills from civilian medical providers that are not paid by the VA in a timely manner. Every veteran should be able to seek high quality responsive health care services without worrying it will lead to financial ruin. We thank Senators Donnelly and Rounds for introducing this important legislation.”

**Carlos Fuentes, Director of National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars said,** “In addition to experiencing long wait times and issues making appointments through the Veterans Choice Program, veterans are also getting billed inappropriately for services when the VA fails to pay health care providers in a timely fashion. The delayed payment of medical bills, which should be covered by VA benefits, can create financial hardship for veterans and damage credit scores. The *Protecting Veterans Credit Act* prohibits medical debt from medical services received through the Veterans Choice Program and other similar VA community care programs from being reported to credit reporting agencies for one year. This would allow time for payment issues to be resolved without impacting veterans’ credit scores.”

# Upcoming Events

- Apr 3—BHNC Honoring Ceremony for Vietnam Veterans—BHNC—9:30 am (MT)  
 Apr 4—Mobile Vet Center visiting Britton (10:00 am— 3:00 pm CT)  
 Apr 5—Mobile Vet Center visiting Aberdeen (9:00 am –4:00 pm CT)  
 Apr 6—Mobile Vet Center Visiting Webster (9:00 am—3:00 pm CT)  
 Apr 6—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall and Claims Clinic—Western Dakota Tech (Dakota Lecture Hall—Room D148) - Rapid City—(Claims Clinic 5:00 pm MT) (Town Hall 6:00 pm MT)  
 Apr 6—BHNC Celebrating 100th Anniversary of WW I—BHNC – 9:30 am (MT)  
 Apr 13—SFVAHCS Veterans Town Hall—Dakota Playhouse—DSU Campus—Madison—5:00 pm (CT) with Benefits Fair at 4:00 pm (CT)  
 Apr 13—Purple Up for Military Kids Day  
 Apr 14—All State Offices will be closed  
 Apr 19—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
 Apr 22—USD Student Veterans Club 5K Run—10:00 am (CT)  
 Apr 28-30—DAV Annual Convention—AmericInn—Fort Pierre  
 May 5-6 Veterans Day at Howard Wood Relays  
 May 6—Military Order of the Purple Heart Convention—Rapid City Howard Johnson—10:00 am (MT)  
 May 12—Improving Combat Veterans Care—Sioux Falls University Center  
 Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)  
 Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota  
 Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota  
 Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota

Activation Ceremony for the 114th Fighter Wing will be held Sunday, April 2, at 1:00 pm (CT) at Hangar 40 at Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls. The 114th is deploying 125 airmen to Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan for 180 days.



Here's  
What's  
Happening!

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